

**AMEND PROPERTY TAX ACT NOW TO MAKE CORPORATIONS SUSTAINABLE
TOMORROW—PLACED ON FACEBOOK SUN/23/JULY/2017.**

After being an active contributing elector in the Diego Martin Regional Corporation Statutory Meetings for 2017, to date, the conclusion is drawn that decisive action must be taken now to realize the efforts and vision emanating from the 13 local government reform, regional consultations held in 2016 by amending the Property Tax Act 2009, giving real meaning to local government, eventually creating sustainable Regional Corporations and the Tobago House of Assembly.

The context, in which the above statement is based, has been derived from the aggressive thrust made to acquire property taxes in 2017, the subsequent halt by the Court and the data circulating, re the monies to be collected from taxing properties.

The Property Tax Act 2009 repealed the power of Corporations to collect taxes in Part VII, Miscellaneous and Section 55.

It was stated recently, that there are 400, 000 property owners in Trinidad and Tobago, of which 200,000 are registered.

It was also stated that the estimated annual property tax to be collected annually will be approximately 500 million dollars, reasonably from those registered. If therefore, all 400,000 persons get registered, we can safely collect 1 billion dollars.

When we add our 14 corporations to the Tobago House of Assembly, the 15 divided by 1 billion gives 150 million dollars to each. This is an achievable goal and will provide the most sustainable development solution, requiring the amendment of the Act, in a manner hereinafter described.

The effort to derive property tax income has 2 other significant benefits incidental to the collection process. In addition to getting income to do all the necessary work and development annually, there is the opportunity to identify and collect the data on properties under the purview of Corporations, for research and development purposes and to exercise effective monitoring of property development in the regions.

Consequently, adequate staff, departments and full time Councillors will be required, which is in harmony with the 2016, 13 regional consultations objective of Local Government Reform.

This opportunity to finally manage reform must not be wasted, is long overdue and will need the cooperation of all and sundry, focusing on National Sustainable Development as opposed to political party development, with an amended Property Tax Act detailing practice and procedure.

Therefore, the *first* critical amendment will inform, that a special fund has to be established for the placement of all taxes collected, to be withdrawn by Corporations in a best fit manner. No Consolidation Fund for this money.

The *second* critical amendment will describe all the new departments and staff to be established and appointed to manage corporation development in the most efficient manner possible.

The *third* critical amendment will detail adequate salaries and allowances for Councillors and Aldermen, making it mandatory that Councillors be full time employees or persons who are employed elsewhere but on no pay leave for the 3 year Councillor appointment.

Of course, a minimum 13 week training programme for all would be Councillors and Aldermen have to be designed and completed with a 95% attendance rate to qualify for such positions.

As a Sector Specialist, I have seen the need for local government to change to achieve its full potential during the last 3 decades of developmental research.

Hoping this plea bears fruit before it is too late.

Signed.....Donald D. Berment, Specialist/HSD/NGA/DVC.
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